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Editorial

Association of Surgeons in Training Conference – Sheffield 2011



Navigating the rocky pathway through surgical training can be challenging, competitive and at times frustrating. The opportunity to meet and socialise with other surgical trainees from across the country is invaluable in making us realise we're all in the same position. Add in a Gala Dinner Party, clinical updates, trainee prize presentations and an opportunity to tackle Royal College Presidents head-on about the topics that matter to us, and the scene is set for a great weekend.

The weekend in question was the 2011 ASiT Conference in Sheffield, our largest ever with nearly 500 trainees attending from across the UK and Ireland. Hosted at the historic Cutlers' Hall, the annual conference provided delegates with a unique opportunity to get-ahead in their surgical training.

A record number of abstract submissions were received, with 930 hailing from all nine surgical specialties. These were encouraged by the many awards on offer, with over £4,750 in trainee prizes available. In addition to the Ansell-ASiT Medal, SARS/ASiT Research Prize and the ASGBI-ASiT Short Paper Prize, the conference now offers numerous specialty awards generously provided by surgical organisations including the Furlong Research Charitable Foundation Orthopaedic Prize, British Transplantation Society Prize, the BASO~The Association of Cancer Surgery Prize, AUGIS Trainee Prize and ALSGBI Trainee Prize. Competition was tough, with less than 50% of abstracts accepted. All these will be published in an indexed issue of Elsevier's International Journal of Surgery.

Our range of five great value pre-conference courses on the Friday is becoming ever-more popular, with the Covidien/Storz Core Laparoscopic Skills, SARS / BJS Research Skills Course and ASiT Surgical Teacher Training courses being particularly over-subscribed. Friday evening saw a social drinks reception in Cutlers' Hall, with a warm welcome to Sheffield from the Master Cutler, head of the ancient Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire trade guild, who trace their origins back to 1624.

The main conference spanned the Saturday and Sunday, opening with three contrasting talks around the theme 'expanding

your surgical career'. Lt Col Ben Banerjee spoke about military careers, with gripping details of current work in Afghanistan. Sir Bruce Keogh addressed the skills required for future NHS work and Professor Chris Lavy spoke passionately about his orthopaedic work in Africa and the potential for undertaking surgery overseas.

Mr John Black, President of the RCSEd, and Mr Ian Ritchie, Vice-President of the RCSEd, represented their respective Colleges in the question-time style debate with delegates that followed, covering such concerns as the 'sub-consultant' grade, protection of the CCT, the European Working Time Directive, and whether we really need three Surgical Royal Colleges in the UK.

These topics proved common themes in the afternoon, with Mr Peter Sharp (CEO, Centre for Workforce Intelligence) discussing the future of the surgical workforce, Dr Alison Carr (MMC Programme Board) addressing the competition ratios in surgery, and Lord Ribeiro asking what we should do with all the surgical trainees currently in the system.

Clinical up-dates were provided by Professor Peter Friend, who described current advances in transplant surgery and Mr Anthony Lander who looked at developments in paediatric surgery.

The Swann-Morton Silver Scalpel Award for excellence in surgical training plays an important part in the conference proceedings. Now in its eleventh year, the reward was established to recognise and pay tribute to consultants who go-the-extra mile to train and inspire their juniors. Nominated by their trainees, the 2011 shortlist is given in [Table 1](#). This year's winner was Mr. Gavin Pettigrew, Consultant Transplant Surgeon from Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge. The Silver Scalpel Lecture was given by the 2010 winner, Mr Ramez Kirolos, Consultant Neurosurgeon at Addenbrookes.

Trainee research presentations for the highest ranked abstracts were welcomes, and trainees also spoke in an entertaining session presenting reports from last year's ASiT Travelling Fellowship and Student Elective Prize winners. The afternoon finished with the ASiT Debate pitching Professor John MacFie against Ben Cresswell arguing as to whether the surgical training is fit for purpose.

**Table 1**

Swann-Morton ASiT Silver Scalpel Award 2011 Nominees.

Mr. Gavin Pettigrew (*2011 award winner*)
Consultant Transplant Surgeon
Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge

Mr. John Leveckis
Consultant Urological Surgeon
Doncaster Royal Infirmary

Mr. Andrew Mavor
Consultant Vascular Surgeon
Leeds General Infirmary

Mr. Henry Marsh
Consultant Neurosurgeon
St. George's Hospital, London

Mr. John Smith
Consultant Upper GI Surgeon
Stobhill Teaching Hospital, Glasgow

Mr. Giles Toogood
Consultant HPB and Transplant Surgeon
St. James's University Hospital, Leeds

The Gala Dinner Party on Saturday night is always a highlight of the ASiT weekend, and this year was no exception. Sheffield City Hall Ballroom hosted over 200 trainees and guests for a champagne reception and four-course dinner. Mr John Black, President of the RCSEng, gave an entertaining after dinner speech which included his reflections on his term as ASiT President 1977–78. The lights then lowered and the party began, with the Serious Hat band keeping the revelry going well into the early hours of the morning.

Sunday opened with a session themed around training, with Professor Mo Baguneid talking about developing an interest as a surgical trainer, and Mr Rajesh Aggarwal describing some of the cutting-edge skills for surgical training and simulation. The ASiT Lecture was given by Professor Alisdair Scotland, Director of the National Clinical Assessment Service, who provided fascinating

data describing his 10-years experience in dealing with individual's clinical performance concerns.

In parallel with Sunday morning's main session, the separate Medical Student Session was as popular as ever with over 60 students hearing a diverse range of talks including practical sessions on applying for core surgical training and how to write an abstract.

The conference closed on Sunday afternoon with a session in which the GMC, JCST and SAC in general surgery were invited to talk about what they are doing to improve surgical training.

As always we are deeply indebted to our corporate partners who recognise the importance of supporting the ASiT Conference and investing in future generations of surgeons. Sixteen exhibitors attended the trade exhibition, and we particularly acknowledge the support of our corporate partners Ethicon, MPS, Ansell, Covidien, SurgicalSkills.net, Wesleyan and Evident.

Plans are already well advanced for our next conference in March 2012, and we will be announcing details over the summer. Following the success of our Hull 2010 and Sheffield 2011 meetings we aim to significantly reduce registration charges for trainees next year. Abstract submissions and registration will open in the autumn. Subscribe to our email updates and read further details on our website www.asit.org.

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